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ABSTRACT

The author describes what is being done by legislators, the Department of Transportation (DOT), States, and school bus contract operators to improve school bus safety. He intimates that communication problems and political problems in the Congress and in the DOT have hindered progress of safety legislation. Two other areas of concern are discussed--the lack of data and the need for better driver training. (JF)

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WASHINGTON D C AND SAFETY LEGISLATION FOR SCHOOL BUSES

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Today we meet to talk SAFETY. This is an impressive assembly of representatives from the pupil transportation industry throughout the United States. For the past year, or since this body's productive meetings in New Orleans last April, everyone of us have discussed SAFETY with our employees, civic groups, organizations, school officials and legislative agencies daily. Now here we are, once again devoting several days to further discussions and workshops on the same subjects.

As I look around the room at you individually, I try to relate my thoughts on SAFETY and what I personnally am doing about it, to you.....as well as how SAFETY fits into your daily life and business.

I am at a disadvantage in that I don't know each of you personally; however, there are area of SAFETY that each of you and I share. These common grounds are the foundations for this all-important Congress.

There is no question in our minds that the results of these meetings bear strong and viable direction for each of us as we go along our daily paths. All of us here know the importantce of SAFETY... we know way sof selling it to the people who work with and for us; We seek ways to sell it to the general public. Many of us have heard just about everything there is to say about SAFETY, but we still come back each year to upgrade our knowledge and further the goals of the nation's safety programs.

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However, with our total expertise and input, plus our dedication to protecting the lives of others, there is one very important person missing. This is the man who possesses the power to impose safety regulations; draft the important bills relating to safety; in other words write the laws of the land. Ladies and Gentlemen, I refer to

Presented at the National Safety Congress and Exposition, October 29-November 1, 1973 in Chicago, Illinois.

your Senator and Representative in the United States Congress! We can sit here for hours, days and weeks developing new, constructive programs based on our knowledge and experience. We can spend thousands of dollars upgrading and improving our industry so that it becomes safer, but when we have deliverated and returned home, many of our efforts may have been invain.

Today in Congress there are 17 bills relating to school bus construction; 7 bills relating to seat belts; and 1 resolution relating to National School Bus Safety Week.

Now the authors of these bills have the best of intentions when they draft these bills and they usually draft them without any attempt to have professional input from any of us in this room. In fact, they rarely request good technical information from the Department of Transportation. Thus aroused with an emotional issue they write bills and more bills. I have a letter on my desk from a New York parent who is requesting heads to roll because of a mechanical failure on a bus when wheels dropped off. No children were injured,but "just the thought of injury to those I hold most dear" caused the parent to send a strong letter with unjust acquisitions to several Congressmen. Congress seems to write bills upon receipt of such letter, rather than check out the facts of the case and we're off and running again with a new crusader in the cause of SAFETY!

Meanwhile, there are many things happening here in Washington. The NHTSA let a contract with Dynamic Sciences of Phoenix, Arizona to study the performance of school buses and take the best of the current models and recommend improvements which will become the basis for future regulations. The School Bus Manufacturers Institute, composed of the six school bus body manufacturers, is currently working with several advisors and indepenent engineers to develop performance

criteria with a series of static load and crashworthiness tests. Tests will be gin this year.

Meanwhile, Congressman, JOhn Moss (D-Calif) is holding hearings on safety defects and school bus construction and seat belt bills.

The DOT just held a 2-day ~~haring~~ hearing on safety defects.

The Vehicle Equipment Safety Commission is beginning to write the Type II Bus Standards for handicapped equipment. The NHTSA is also asking for assistance and input for promulgation of Type II Bus Standards.

I appears that there are many groups all writing standards and heading on a collision course with the end result. You and I will be asked to pick up the pieces and keep a safe pupil transportation system running in the nation.

The duplication and competition for "who gets the credit" is an ever maddening problem.

While the NHTSA is perfoming its bit, the various departments under the DOT are performing their's..however they just don't bother to communicate with each other.

Congressman Moss hopes to win the construction race by including in his language a six months period for promulgation of his standard. The tests of SBMI and the Dynamic Sciences will be at least another 18 months away. Thus we would have laws without any of the valuable data as a basis.

But as sensational items such as Agnew resigning, Watergate, etc. keep the Congress busy, the majority of these safety bills won't reach the floor of either house for a vote. But, they will come up again next session.

Meanwhile, DOT has received enough proposed standards to make a file several inches think and the personnel whill waste their time following through Congressional input. The appointed Task Force

will indicate after months of deliberation that the proposed standards should be recalled.

Very frankly, Gentlemen, we have to live with the power structure and are touched in some place by all of these agencies. So we don't aim to fuss with any of them, but to get along with them all. Occasionaly we take a strong stand for the benefit of the entire industry, such as compliance of the transit industry to safety principals when they transport children.

Once these standards or laws have been promulgated at the Federal level, it is then up to the individual states to adopt them, or to write similar laws which will paralell the Federal standards.

Even though there is justified criticism about the slowness of the DOT..they are working to issue standards and trying to be sure that these are standards which we can live with. The slowness does insure some soundness.

However, we have not been able to induce action in the two areas which most concern us: 1) the need for more data; and 2) driver training.

1. Standard 18 was to have been the data gathering standard. It is now going to become part of Standard 10 and the NHTSA is requesting ideas from the industry regarding the data needed here.

2. Driver Training...I refer to Driver Training specifically because it is the general consensus of the documented data (even though treated lightly by the Federal Government) that our recent tragic accidents could have been avoided if the driver had been properly selected, trained and motivated in safety concepts.

Much of todays standards and legislation could be eliminated if the nation took a more serious position on uniform driver training programs. Today across the nation school bus drivers are exposed to everything from a complete 5-day training course in New Mexico

to "once around the block, Charlie" type training. In between the broad expremes of programs, you'll find sound, constructive training that are being used.

The various driver training programs now ont he drawing boards number many. The DOT has let a contract to a research firm to develop curriculum for such a program; the NASBCO is developing a driver training program which the contractor can use without imposing exhorbatant ~~costs~~- economic pressures on him, yet which will be adequte to train as well as keep up in-service trianing. You are all familiar with the NSCouncil's supplemental School Bus Driver Training Program an the DDC cours. The BMCS just awarded Rowland and Be.Co. an 18-month contract to study and develop criteria for mimimum traning for bus and truck drivers.

When the talk of school bus accidents and school bus construction issues are disuussed.."No matter how strong you build a school bus or how many standards you promulgate to make the vehicle identification more uniform...without the well-trained driver, the rest means nothing." I hear that said mamy times and I have quoted the same at Congressional Hearings..

Frankly, it makes sense. The need to mandate driver training is spelled out in Standard 17. Now, the problem on implementing such a mandate becomes the responsibility of each of us, here in this room.

Even after such a uniform program has been drafted and accepted nationally, the work begins on how to get it to the some 275,000 drivers. The size of their operations also have a bearing on how to implement the program. It is obvious that the small district or contractor cannot employ a person to coordinate to total safety program in their operation, however, the 30 bus operation and up can and should have a qualified instructor on the payroll, even if he doubles as a mechanic, dispatcher, office personnel, or driver.

Many of the larger contractors have employed "full time" safety directors. Their roll is to instruct driver training courses, check vehicles, and investigate accidents where their buses were involved. This is an extremely important position. In fact, I consider the position of safety director one of the most valuable members of any staff. One large contractor in Rhode Island has reduced their accidents by 50% since putting on a safety director. Other contractors are making similar statements.

I am aware that many of you fleet operators have had safety directors on your payroll for some time now...and know the value of this person...and to you, I ask, could you operate today without you safety director? Second, don't you agree that this person's role has been a strong influence on your present safety

record? Last, but not least, if all the knowledge and expertise you have gained as a result of the safety programs you have implemented in your fleet would be made available to our congressional leaders, would we soon see where the real thrust in safety legislation and standards should be put? Think about it.

One of the finest programs recognizing the school bus driver and his driving ability was developed from expertise members of this group. The Certification of the Professional School Bus Operator by the National Safety Council is a new and long needed program designed to provide fitting recognition of the high standards of excellance demanded in transporting our most precious cargo...20 million children daily. Another area of great impact to the drivers' ability and training is the National Association of School Bus Contract-Operator's National School Bus Safety Roadeo. The third such event was held here in Chicago and covered by NBC News on their recent School Bus Safety Program. This Roadeo brings together the nation's top drivers. It provides a showcase of top talent for the nation to see. The advantages of this Roadeo is felt nationwide in recognition for the school bus driver and the role everyone of us is playing in recognizing the safety efforts we practice daily. The fourth annual Roadeo will be held at Disneyland in Anaheim, California next July 25, 1974. We would like to encourage broader participation from all of your schools. I think all of us will agree with the vast amount of adverse publicity we read whenever there is an accident involving a school bus. It is hard to overcome, in many cases, if the facts were known and published in the same

article as the accident story itself, a large percentage of these accidents were caused by the other person or vehicle or by faulty equipment on the vehicle itself. School bus drivers do not go looking for accidents as some of these stories would lead one to believe.

I mentioned briefly, a minute ago, about NBC News covering our National Roadeo here in Chicago last July and shown September 23rd. (Ask how many saw it) The response we had from helping with the film and being a big part of it was simply...that it took the emphasis off of school bus construction and put the problem square in our laps....and that is....the need for driver training.

I am not overlooking the fact that school bus construction is a problem...it is a very serious problem that the industry is very much aware of and efforts are underway in four different areas to develop a school bus construction standard everyone can live with....but regardless of the end results of construction standards, the problem goes back to the driver.

I know you expected a "Washington Report" from me as this is my primary role in Washington and for the contractors association. I guess you could say I talked about some federal problems I see developing in Washington. I also feel I have touched upon some of the solutions.

With the support you provide when you are called upon will be the basis of good constructive legislation and standards. Without your support the professional integrity from the users of safety...you in this audience today, will find legislation

for the few and impossible laws for the mass. Keep in touch with your Senators and Congressmen.....send them information on your safety programs, be aware of what is happening in Washington and keep them aware of what you are....Remember....it affects us all. Safety, like any habit, must be learned, then by practice earned.